

EU leaders meet with Zelenskyy, underscore EU's continued support for Ukraine



European Council President Charles Michel, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in Kyiv today.

Today, as the war along the contact line between the Russian and Ukrainian forces in eastern Ukraine continued, European Council President Charles Michel and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kyiv for the 24th EU-Ukraine Summit. Following the meeting, the leaders issued a lengthy 32-point joint statement which condemned in the strongest possible terms Russia's "ongoing unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine" and discussed in some detail the various forms of assistance – military, economic, financial, humanitarian – the EU has provided and will continue to provide Ukraine. The EU, it said, "will support Ukraine and the Ukrainian people against Russia's ongoing war of aggression for as long as it takes." And they highlighted "the historical importance of the decision of the European Council of 23 June 2022 to recognize the European perspective of and grant the status of candidate country to Ukraine. We reiterated that the future of Ukraine and its citizens lies within the European Union. We share common values of democracy, rule of law, respect for international law and human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, as well as gender equality. The EU reiterated its unwavering support and commitment to Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders."

In regard to the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, including their commitment to create a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, as well as the accession process, the EU leaders reiterated the EU's commitment to support Ukraine's further European integration and stated the EU will decide on further steps once all of the conditions in last June's opinion on Ukraine's

candidacy are fully met. Ukraine for its part underlined its determination to meet the necessary requirements in order to start accession negotiations as soon as possible. In that regard, the leaders noted in particular the necessity for Ukraine to comprehensively and consistently implement judicial reforms, including the reform of its Constitutional Court and the selection procedure of politically independent and qualified constitutional judges, and noted as well the need to continue making progress in regard to the effective operation of the anti-corruption institutions.

Regarding the war itself, the EU “reaffirmed its unwavering support for and solidarity with Ukraine in the face of the ongoing Russian war of aggression” and condemned the “systematic use by Russia of missiles and drones to attack civilians and civilian objects and infrastructure across Ukraine, in breach of International Humanitarian Law.” Importantly, they said they “firmly reject and unequivocally condemn the attempted illegal annexation by Russia of Ukraine’s Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions. As in the case of Crimea and Sevastopol, the European Union will never recognize as lawful any attempted illegal annexations of any parts of Ukrainian territory. We demand that Russia immediately, completely, and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.”

And the EU leaders went beyond that and called for accountability: “We stressed that war crimes and the other most serious crimes committed during Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine of which there is growing evidence, are a gross violation of international law. We underlined our support for the investigations by the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. Russia, and all perpetrators and accomplices, will be held to account. We agreed to continue working together to ensure full accountability, including by establishing an appropriate mechanism for the crime of aggression, the prosecution of which is of interest to the international community as a whole. Ukraine emphasized its preference for establishing a Special Tribunal. We support the development of an international centre for the prosecution of the crime of aggression in Ukraine (ICPA) in The Hague with the objective to coordinate investigation of the crime of aggression against Ukraine, preserve and store evidence for future trials.”

The leaders also discussed how to further support Ukraine and how to increase collective pressure on Russia to end its war of aggression and withdraw from Ukraine. The EU, which has already implemented nine packages of restrictive measures as well as an international oil and oil products price cap, said it stands ready to continue to reinforce restrictive measures in coordination with other partners. The EU also noted that it has provided more than €3.6 billion in military assistance under the European Peace Facility and has launched the EU Military Assistance Mission to train an initial 30,000 soldiers in 2023, and that, together with the support provided by EU member states, the overall EU military support for Ukraine is estimated to be close to €12 billion. Overall EU assistance, including in addition to military support, financial, humanitarian, emergency, and budgetary support, amounts thus far, the statement said, to nearly €50 billion. The EU, the statement said, “will stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes.”

Finally and importantly, because all wars – even this war – have to end at some point, “the EU reiterated its readiness to support Ukraine’s initiative for a just peace based on respect for Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. To date, Russia has not shown any genuine

willingness regarding a fair and sustainable peace. We expressed our support to the peace formula of President Zelenskyy and our commitment to actively work with Ukraine on the 10-point peace plan. In this regard, we support the idea of a Peace Formula Summit aiming at launching its implementation. We will work together to ensure the widest possible international participation.”

Meanwhile, along the contact line in eastern Ukraine, the war goes on, focused primarily on Russia’s continuing effort to encircle and take the city of Bakhmut (pre-war population 70,000), an important road and rail junction that, if taken, would open a pathway for Russian forces toward the two largest cities in the western portion of Donetsk region – Kramatorsk (pre-war population 160,000), which yesterday was once again the target of Russian missile strikes, and Slovyansk (pre-war population 110,000). At a news conference after the meeting, Zelenskyy said, “Nobody will give away Bakhmut. We will fight for as long as we can. We consider Bakhmut our fortress. If weapon supplies are accelerated, specifically long-range weapons, not only will we not abandon Bakhmut but we will also begin to remove the occupiers from the Donbas.” Whether Ukraine can in fact hold Bakhmut, block a Russian advance on the larger cities to the west, and “remove the occupiers from the Donbas” once Russia’s widely-anticipated offensive gets underway later this month remains to be seen. But with the assistance of the EU and others, perhaps it will.

David R. Cameron
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